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ABSTRACT

To ascertain the impact of home and school visitation, attendance records from a random sample of seventh, ninth and tenth grade students were examined. Information gathered was to determine the number of absences, unexcused absences and referrals. Records of students contacted by home and school visitors were examined to determine attendance rates before and after contact. Results revealed that attendance was worse in the tenth grade than in seventh grade, that it was worse during the second half of the school year, and it was worse for the referred groups. No difference in attendance pattern was found between the referred groups and the no referral group, or after contact by the home and school visitor. As a final recommendation, a confirmatory study was suggested of referred cases before firm policy decisions are made. Although this is geographically specific, this should be of use to attendance personnel in other urban school districts. (Author/BMW)

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IMPACT OF HOME AND SCHOOL VISITOR SERVICE:
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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Abstract

This study examined the attendance records of a random sample of students in the 7th, 9th, and 10th grades. Information gathered included number of absences, number of unexcused absences, and number of referrals. Records of students contacted by Home and School Visitors were examined to determine attendance rates both before and after contact.

It was found that attendance was worse in the 10th grade than in the 7th, that it was worse during the second half of the school year than during the first half, and that it was worse for the referred groups than for the no referral group. No difference in attendance pattern was found between the referred groups and the no referral group. No difference in attendance rate was observed after contact by the Home and School Visitor. It was also found that initial contact by the Home and School Visitor did not occur until the student had been absent for from seven to nine weeks.

Once cases handled by attendance aides (C.E.T.A.), cases processed for drops, and cases with incomplete records were eliminated, the number of cases remaining in the referred groups (out of an originally adequate overall sample) was smaller than desirable for confident generalization. For that reason, it is recommended that a confirmatory study of referred cases be conducted before firm policy decisions are made.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study was initiated at the request of Dr. Bernard Rafferty, Associate Superintendent for External Operations. Its purpose was to document the impact of the Home and School Visitors on the attendance rates of the students with whom they came into contact.

Since this study was based on a random sample of students, the opportunity was provided to examine the attendance patterns of students who were never served by the Home and School Visitors. While this group provided a contrast population which provided some perspective for the findings within the target population, it did not constitute a true control group, and it should not be interpreted as such.

II. THE SAMPLE

This study was limited to three grades, since the intention was to conduct it without additional resources, and study activities had to be conducted over and above the established job responsibilities of those involved.

In consultation with Mr. Allen Baxter, it was decided that the study would concentrate on Grades 7, 9 and 10, since they had been identified as being particularly important ones by the attendance department.

The Division of Administrative and Survey Research Services drew a random sample from all pupils on the Pupil Directory File (PDIF) who were in the grades involved during the 1978-1979 school year. The initial sample included:

Grade 7 - 404 students

Grade 9 - 414 students

Grade 10 - 466 students

Based on the literature on sampling, these numbers were considered large enough to permit reliable generalization to all students in each of the grades involved, even allowing for the inevitable loss of some cases.

III. DATA COLLECTION

All data was collected during the last week of the 1978-1979 school year. The list of names drawn was divided up by district, and the district attendance supervisors further assigned them to the Home and School Visitors within their districts.

As anticipated, not all records were found. Some were in transit between schools; some were found, but the records were not complete; and a few could not be located at all.

In an effort to recover the maximum amount of data, a second effort was made during the summer to recover missing cases. (In this regard special appreciation is due to Mr. Ben Baughn, Attendance Supervisor and Miss Carolyn Iwamoto, Research Assistant.) It was finally possible to account for 96% of the cases in Grades 7 and 9 and 92% of the cases in Grade 10. Additional cases in each grade were dropped (Grade 7 - 25; Grade 9 - 39; and Grade 10 - 49) due to incompleteness of records or the fact that the students were admitted late or dropped from roll during the school year.

IV. FINDINGS

It is necessary that several points be explained before data is presented. Since this study was limited to the effects of the efforts of Home and School Visitors, the data was not collected in such a manner as to separate out the effects of the attendance aides (C.E.T.A.) in the high schools. Any cases handled by attendance aides were tabulated with the no referral group.

Another point to keep in mind is that the critical date in this study was the date of first contact and not the date of referral. Moreover, if the Home and School Visitor was not able to make contact with the home of the child (regardless of the number of attempts to do so), the case was tabulated with the no referral group. The rationale for this was predicated upon the notion that the impact of the Home and School Visitor could be considered only after contact.

A final point to keep in mind is that cases that were processed for drops were not included in this study. While it is true that time and effort were expended on them, these cases, by definition, were terminal and so could not provide evidence on the effect of the Home and School Visitor on attendance.

All cases in this study were separated into three groups: no referral, one referral, and more than one referral (Table 1). Again, it is necessary to be mindful of the definition of "referral" used for this study. The referred groups did not include cases where contact could not be made, where drops resulted, or where cases were handled by attendance aides.

Table 1
Numbers in Study By Grade and Referral Group
1978 - 1979 School Year

Referral Group	Grade 7	Grade 9	Grade 10
No Referral	338	287	317
One Referral	12	27	31
More than One Referral	12	43	34
Total	362	357	382
Grand Total			1,101

The first analysis was to compare the attendance of the three referral groups during the first half of the school year (i.e., September - January 31st) vs. the second half as a way of getting an overall picture of the groups.

Table 2

Average Percent Attendance by Grade of the Three Referral Groups,
First Half vs. Second Half 1978 - 1979 School Year

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>		<u>Grade 9</u>		<u>Grade 10</u>	
	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half
No Referral	91%	88%	88%	84%	85%	80%
One Referral	69%	64%	66%	55%	66%	56%
More Than One Referral	47%	43%	51%	47%	49%	32%

Table 2, reveals, not surprisingly, that overall, the percentage of attendance declines with the increase in grade and that first-half attendance is better than second-half attendance. Though, as one would expect, attendance was lower in the referred groups than the no referral group, the pattern from first half to second half was similar, except that the referred groups experienced somewhat greater declines.

In a further effort to describe the attendance patterns of the groups considered, the range of attendance (i.e., the percent attendance of each individual) was determined. This information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Range of Attendance by Grade for the Three Referral Groups 1978 - 1979
First Half of the School Year vs. Second Half

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>				<u>Grade 9</u>				<u>Grade 10</u>			
	First Half		Second Half		First Half		Second Half		First Half		Second Half	
	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest
No Referral	0%	100%	23%	100%	0%	100%	1%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%
One Referral	45%	93%	15%	93%	0%	96%	0%	95%	0%	89%	0%	97%
More than One Referral	4%	84%	4%	91%	0%	95%	1%	93%	0%	85%	1%	73%

Table 3 reveals that there were low attending students in the no referral group and high attending students in the referred groups. The first finding can be explained by the fact that cases handled by attendance aides would appear in this group, as well as cases with which the Home and School Visitor could not make contact. The latter finding, however, cannot be explained as easily. One might speculate that students with past records of poor attendance might have been referred after only a few absences. This issue, however, might well warrant further investigation, since it might give information about utilization of the time of the Home and School Visitor.

Since the referred groups are, by definition, different from the no referral group, in that they are students with particular attendance related problems, any attempt to compare them might well be questionable. Still, there is a wide area of overlap among the groups in percent attendance. For that reason, an additional look was taken at the students in the area of overlap. Students in all three groups whose attendance rate was 85% or less during the first half of the school year were compared. Thus, the students with the best attendance records were eliminated from the no referral group. This made the three groups more nearly comparable with regard to initial attendance rates. This information is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Average Percent Attendance by Grade of Students Whose Attendance
During the First Half was 85% or Less

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>			<u>Grade 9</u>			<u>Grade 10</u>		
	First Half	Second Half	N	First Half	Second Half	N	First Half	Second Half	N
No Referral	74%	76%	65	67%	64%	73	66%	58%	111
One Referral	63%	56%	9	58%	53%	23	63%	54%	28
More than One Referral	47%	43%	12	48%	45%	40	49%	32%	34

Table 4 repeats the patterns observed earlier: the percent attendance declines somewhat with the increase in grade, and the attendance of the referred groups is poorer than that of the no referral group. Generally, attendance during the second half of the year was worse than during the first half. This was true of all three grades, though somewhat more pronounced in tenth grade.

A further examination of the data was made by eliminating all but the poorest attending students from all groups. Only those students who were absent at least 35% of the time during the first half of the year were included in this analysis. This cut off point was selected because it was large enough to indicate a serious attendance problem (i.e., over six weeks of absence during the first half of the school year), while still containing sufficient cases for analysis. This information is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Average Percent Attendance by Grade of Students Absent at Least
35% of the Time During the First Half

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>			<u>Grade 9</u>			<u>Grade 10</u>		
	First Half	Second Half	N	First Half	Second Half	N	First Half	Second Half	N
No Referral	52%	58%	10	42%	43%	21	43%	33%	40
One Referral	57%	50%	6	45%	43%	14	46%	39%	12
More than One Referral	36%	35%	9	37%	39%	29	41%	27%	26

Regardless of the reduction in numbers, the pattern observed in Table 5 is not substantively different from that in Table 4. Though the multiple referral group displayed worse attendance than the other two groups, there appeared to be no substantive difference in the pattern (i.e., from grade to grade and from first half to second half) among them.

Table 6

Average Number of Unexcused Absences, By Grade, By Half of the
School Year, By Referral Group

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>		<u>Grade 9</u>		<u>Grade 10</u>	
	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half
No Referral	5	7	7	10	9	14
One Referral	16	26	22	33	22	35
More than One Referral	41	4	34	41	38	54

Table 6 displays an increase in the average number of unexcused absences, though, overall, a moderate one, between the first half of the school year and the second half. There is a more limited increase with the increase in grade. The largest increase, not surprisingly, is observed between the referred groups and the no referral group. This will be brought into sharper focus by observing these averages as percentages of total absences. Table 7 presents the percentage of all absences that were coded as unexcused.

Table 7

Percent of Total Absences Coded as Unexcused, By Grade, By Half of the Year, and By Referral Group

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>		<u>Grade 9</u>		<u>Grade 10</u>	
	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half	First Half	Second Half
No Referral	62%	64%	64%	67%	69%	74%
One Referral	59%	76%	73%	79%	73%	85%
More than One Referral	87%	85%	79%	82%	84%	84%

Table 7 reveals that differences from the first half of the school year to the second and among grades were not great. Large differences however, can be observed among the referred groups. As one would anticipate, the multiple referral group had the greatest proportion of absences that were unexcused and the no referral group had the least.

The remainder of this report will deal with the referred groups. In an attempt to make a direct assessment of the impact of the Home and School Visitors on the students visited, the percent attendance of each child before and after the initial contact of the Home and School Visitor was calculated, and this information was then summed across all students within each referral group, within each grade. This information is presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Percent Attendance Before and After Initial Contact
By Home and School Visitor

Time Period	<u>Grade 7</u>		<u>Grade 9</u>		<u>Grade 10</u>	
	One Referral (N=12)	More Than One Referral (N=12)	One Referral (N=27)	More Than One Referral (N=43)	One Referral (N=31)	More Than One Referral (N=34)
Before Contact	66%	46%	62%	53%	61%	53%
After Contact	67%	43%	51%	43%	62%	30%

Table 8 shows no improvement in attendance after initial contact. Grade 9 and the multiple referral group in Grade 10 showed declines in attendance. Though the cases reported above were, in fact, from a random sample of the grades involved, it would be well to note that the numbers are small. It would therefore, be wise to collect some additional information before drawing firm conclusions.

In preparing the above information, it was noted that the time elapsing before initial contact was quite large. For that reason the average number of absences before contact was calculated. This information is presented in Table 9.

Table 9
Average Number of Absences Before First Contact

Referral Group	<u>Grade 7</u>		<u>Grade 9</u>		<u>Grade 10</u>	
	N	Absences	N	Absences	N	Absences
One Referral	12	35	27	44	31	43
More Than One Referral	12	37	43	39	34	38

Table 9 indicates that initial contact was made only after 7-9 weeks of absence.

In interpreting this information, it is vital that several points be kept in mind:

1. The numbers in this sample are small, for reasons discussed earlier.
2. The figures above represent the number of absences prior to contact, and not prior to referral. No information concerning lag time between referral and contact was generated for this sample.
3. It is entirely possible that, in the case of high schools, a prior referral to the attendance aide (C.E.T.A.) was made. Such information was not collected for this study.
4. It is entirely possible that not all of the absences represented in Table 9 were unexplained (i.e., teachers may have received notes for them.) Based on the percent of absences coded

unexcused, it is estimated that one-fifth to one-third of the absences in all groups were excused (some of these codings might have been from the CEH 14 rather than parental note).

V. STUDY OF 1977-1978 SCHOOL YEAR

Data for the 1977-1978 school year was obtained for the sample of students in this study, and the same calculations were made as described above. Aside from the fact that additional cases were lost (i.e., due to missing records, incomplete records, and students not in the school system at that time), no substantive difference in patterns was observed.

Since both the interpretation and the conclusions would be substantially the same, it was considered that no useful purpose could be served by presenting another series of tables. The data is prepared, however, and is available upon request.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study was unable to demonstrate any impact on student attendance associated with contact made by Home and School Visitors. The pattern of attendance between the first and second half of the school year was the same for all groups. This was true not only for the total sample (Table 2), but also for students who were present 85% of the time or less during the first half of the year (Table 4) and those present 65% of the time or less (Table 5) during the same period.

Considering only those students who received Home and School Visitor service, there was no indication of improvement in attendance after initial contact by the Home and School Visitor (Table 8).

The initial contact made by the Home and School Visitor did not come until the student had been absent an average of 7-9 weeks. It is not clear whether this was due to a time during which other remedies were being tried or whether it was due to the referral practices of teachers.

VII. DISCUSSION

This study indicated that the attendance patterns of referred students was not substantively different from no referral students, except that it was generally lower. The pattern did not appear to be affected one way or the other by the intervention of the Home and School Visitor.

Several factors, however, interfere with the straightforward interpretation of this finding. First, is the activity of the attendance aides (C.E.T.A.). Since this study focused on the impact of the Home and School Visitor, cases handled by the attendance aides were, by definition, "No Referral." This may, in part, account for the similarities in attendance patterns.

Still, one cannot ignore the fact that the Grade 7 pattern was not remarkably different from the Grade 9 and Grade 10 pattern, even though no attendance aides were involved.

Another consideration is the broad area of overlap between referred and no referral groups in terms of percent attendance. Some students in the referred groups had better attendance than some students in the no referral group. It is not clear whether this was a reaction to the previous attendance patterns of some pupils or whether there was an inconsistency in referral practices.

The delay prior to initial contact is another issue of importance. It is not clear whether teachers just let things go "too long", whether referral was not warranted earlier, or whether there was inconsistency in referral practices. On the average, students had been absent for something like two months (though not necessarily at one time) before contact was made.

Finally, it is important to take into consideration the size of the referred groups. Though the initial sample was sufficiently large, the size of the referred groups was much smaller than desirable for reasons

discussed above. While generalizations based on the total sample might be viewed with some confidence, generalizations based on the rather small numbers remaining in the referred groups should be viewed as only tentative.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. It is strongly recommended that an additional study be done concentrating on referred students. This study should attempt to accomplish the following:
 - (a) Verify the findings of the present study with regard to attendance patterns before and after initial contact by the Home and School Visitor.
 - (b) Isolate and study the impact of the attendance aide (C.E.T.A.) on attendance in the same manner as above. Compare the two pupil populations with regard to attendance record. (The same might be done if substantial number of families were contacted regarding attendance by counselors, etc.)
 - (c) Determine the average amount of lag time between teacher referral and Home and School Visitor contact.
2. Consider whether referral policy needs to be reiterated and its implementation monitored.
3. Consider whether some action to monitor completeness of records is warranted. A further survey of records -- just to determine completeness -- would provide information for such a decision.